Research Notes for James H. Whelan (1848 - 1896)

Research Overview:

James H. Whelan was born in Dungarvan, County Waterford, in 1848, during the closing years of the Irish Potato Famine (1845–1852). He immigrated to the United States in 1873. He married Mary Ann Dempsey, whose parents were Irish-born but who herself was born in Washington, D.C., shortly before the Civil War. Together, they formed a family whose movements were shaped by work rather than instability. James earned his living through manual labor, going where employment was available, and over time, the family established a more consistent home base in Armourdale, Kansas, even as James took work out of state. Their movements occurred within an extended family network that included Mary Ann's parents and her brother James Dempsey, whose large family appears repeatedly alongside them in the record. Judging by the occupations recorded for James and later for his sons and grandson, he was likely a physically strong man accustomed to sustained manual labor. The least well-documented period of his life falls between his youth in Ireland and his later, better-recorded years in the United States, particularly his first years after arrival and how he came to be in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

James's Irish origins are documented with unusual clarity. His baptism in Dungarvan names both parents and sponsors, firmly situating him within a defined local family network in Waterford. Unlike many Irish families formed during the famine and immediate post-famine years, James's siblings are also well documented, whether they remained in Dungarvan or emigrated to the United States. Taken together, these records preserve an unusually complete picture of his Irish family.

In the United States, James worked primarily as a stonemason to support his family. His movements across Tennessee, Missouri, and Kansas were based on the availability of work rather than family instability. This work pattern was supported by the continued presence of Mary Ann Dempsey's parents and her brother James Dempsey, whose family appears alongside the Whelans across multiple records."

Over time, the family established a more consistent home base in Armourdale, Kansas, even as James continued to take employment out of state. This pattern—maintaining a fixed household while the wage earner traveled for work—appears repeatedly in the record and is consistent with the experiences of skilled laborers in this period.

James Whelan and Mary Ann Dempsey had eleven children, six of whom died before adulthood. These losses occurred over time as the family was establishing itself in the United States, alongside continued births and the survival of younger children. Despite these deaths, the household did not fragment. James and Mary Ann raised their surviving children within a close-knit extended family that included Mary Ann's parents and her brother James Dempsey, whose own large family appears repeatedly in the same places.

In May 1896, Mary Ann died, followed by James' death two months later. By the middle of that summer, their young, surviving children were orphaned, abruptly ending the household James and Mary Ann had built. The records from James's final months are limited but point to the cumulative strain of years of physical labor and responsibility. The record of his final years is uneven, but it preserves enough detail to show a working man worn down by physical labor and responsibility rather than one who simply disappears from view.

Time Line:

1845 to 1852 - Irish Potato Famine

Oct 1848– **Born** at Dungarvan, Waterford, Ireland. James H. Whalen's tombstone states a birth date of 15 Aug 1953. His Irish baptismal record is dated 18 Oct 1848. Traditionally, Irish baptisms from this era took place the day after birth.[1]

18 Oct 1848 – Baptism at Dungarvan, Waterford, Ireland. Sponsors: Matthew Morrisey and Brigid Whelan.[2]

Before 1851 - Death of sister Mary Whelan in Waterford, Ireland.[3]

Jan 1851 - Birth of sister Mary Whelan in Waterford, Ireland.[4]

11 Sep 1852 - Birth of sister Honoria E. "Nora" Whelan in Dungarvan, Waterford, Ireland.[5]

7 Mar 1855 - Birth of sister Johanna "Anna" Whelan in Dungarvan, Waterford, Ireland.[6]

Before 1856 - Death of brother Michael Whelan in Dungarvan, Waterford, Ireland.[7]

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[1] Estimated based on his Irish Baptismal Record

[2] Dungarvan Roman Catholic Parish (County Waterford, Ireland), Parish Registers 1838 - 1877, Jacobus Whelan, baptized 18 October 1848; digital image, "Ireland, Catholic Parish Registers, 1655 - 1915, Ancestry.

[3] Estimated based on the death of a sister named Mary and the birth of another sister named Mary.

[4] Dungarvan Roman Catholic Parish (County Waterford, Ireland), Parish Registers 1838 - 1877, Mary Whelan, baptized 11 Jan 1851; digital image, "Ireland, Catholic Parish Registers, 1655 - 1915, Ancestry.

[5] Dungarvan Roman Catholic Parish (County Waterford, Ireland), Parish Registers 1838 - 1877, Honoria Whelan, baptized 11 Sep 1852; digital image, "Ireland, Catholic Parish Registers, 1655 - 1915, Ancestry.

[6] Dungarvan Roman Catholic Parish (County Waterford, Ireland), Parish Registers 1838 - 1877, Johanna Whelan, baptized 7 May 1855; digital image, "Ireland, Catholic Parish Registers, 1655 - 1915, Ancestry.

[7] Estimated based on the death of a brother named Michael and the birth of another brother named Michael.

11 Aug 1856 - Birth of brother Michael Whelan in Dungarvan, Waterford, Ireland.[8]

6 Apr 1860 - Birth of sister Mary Whelan in Dungarvan, Waterford, Ireland.[9]

Jun 1861 - Birth of sister Margaret Whelan in Dungarvan, Waterford, Ireland.[10]

These Irish records establish James Whelan's family structure clearly, but they do not document his activities as a young adult prior to emigration."

2 Jul 1873 - Arrival Immigration at New York, New York, New York.[11]

Ship: "France" from Queensland, Cork, Ireland, arrived at Castle Garden.

This record marks the beginning of a better-documented period in James Whelan's life; his earliest years in the United States remain largely undocumented.

16 May 1877 - Marriage at Hamilton, Tennessee, to Mary Ann Dempsey.[12]

The marriage was recorded at St Peter and Paul Catholic Church in Chattanooga, Tennessee, but the ceremony occurred at the Chattanooga Train Station, where James and Mary's father, Patrick Dempsey, worked.

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[8] Dungarvan Roman Catholic Parish (County Waterford, Ireland), Parish Registers 1838 - 1877, Michael Whelan, baptized 11 Aug 1856; digital image, "Ireland, Catholic Parish Registers, 1655 - 1915, Ancestry.

[9] Dungarvan Roman Catholic Parish (County Waterford, Ireland), Parish Registers 1838 - 1877, Mary Whelan, baptized 6 Apr 1860; digital image, "Ireland, Catholic Parish Registers, 1655 - 1915, Ancestry.

[10] Dungarvan Roman Catholic Parish (County Waterford, Ireland), Parish Registers 1838 - 1877, Margaret Whelan, baptized Jun 1861; digital image, "Ireland, Catholic Parish Registers, 1655 - 1915, Ancestry.

[11] United States, Treasury Department, Customs Service, Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at New York, New York, 18320 - 1897, SS France, arrived 2 July 1873, p. 12, Line 26, James Whalen; digital image, "New York, Passenger and Crew Lists (including Castle Garden and Ellis Island), 1820 - 1957," Ancestry.

[12] Hamilton County (Tennessee) County Court, Marriage Licenses Volume 3, p. 76, J.H. Whelan to Mary A Dempsey married 16 May 1877; digital image, "Tennessee, County Marriages, 1790 - 1950," FamilySearch.

26 Feb 1878 - Birth of daughter Catherine Elizabeth Whalen in Chattanooga, Hamilton, Tennessee.[13]

1 Jun 1880 - U.S. Census at Lone Oaks, Bates, Missouri.[14]

James Whaan - white, male, age 29, born Ireland, father born in Ireland, mother born in Ireland.

Mary Whaan - white, female, age 22, born Washington DC, father born Ireland, mother born Ireland.

Katie Whaan - white, female, age 2, born Tennessee, father born Ireland, mother born Washington DC

Mary Whaan - white, female, age 4/12, born Kansas, father born Ireland, mother born Washington DC

Sep 1880 - Birth of daughter Mary "Minnie" Whalen at Winfield, Cowley, Kansas.[15]

After 1881 - Death of sister Johanna "Anna" Whelan at Dungarvan, County Waterford, Ireland.[16]

1882 - Birth of daughter Jane Whalen in Kansas.[17]

[13] Chattanooga, Tennessee SS Peter and Paul Catholic Church records.

[14] 1880 U.S. Census (Population Schedule), Lone Oak, Bates County, Missouri, ED 159, Sheet 220A, Dwelling 154, Family 168, James Whaan household; digital image, "1880 United States Federal Census," Ancestry.

[15] Kansas City, Kansas, Mortality Record, B:35, no. 190740, Minnie Norris death, 1905; Kansas City Clerk's Office, Kansas City, Kansas; KSHS microfilm AR 4505

[16] Ireland, Civil Registration Deaths Index, 1864-1958. "Ireland, Civil Registration Indexes 1845–1958," Index. FamilySearch, Salt Lake City, Utah. General Register Office, Republic of Ireland. "Quarterly Returns of Deaths in Ireland with Index to Deaths.".

[17] 1885 Kansas State Census, Wyandotte, Wyandotte County, p. 148, James Whalen household; digital image, "Kansas, U.S., State Census Collection, 1855 - 1925," Ancestry.

21 Nov 1883 - Deed in Wyandotte, Kansas.[18]

12 Aug 1884 - Birth of son James Whalen at Armourdale, Wyandotte, Kansas.[19]

By this point, Armourdale functioned as a stable household base, even as James continued to travel for work

1 Mar 1885 - Kansas Census at Armourdale, Wyandotte, Kansas.[20]

James Whalen, 36

James Massen, 46

Frank Evans, 35

Mike Whalen, 45

Mary Whalen, 25

Kate Whalen, 7

Minnie Whalen, 5

Jane Whalen, 3

26 May 1885 - Arrested at Armourdale, Wyandotte, Kansas.[21]

"Mr. James Whalen was arrested yesterday by Marshal Howard and convicted of violating the city ordinance." Kansas City Times - Armourdale

[18] Wyandotte County (Kansas) County Court, Deed Record Volume 42, pp. 153 - 154, James Whalan from Kaw Valley Town Site and Bridge Company, dated [November?] 1883; digital image, "Whalen 1883 Deed_1" and "Whalen 1883 Deed_2."

[19] St. Thomas Catholic Church Baptismal Record

[20] 1885 Kansas State Census, Wyandotte, Wyandotte County, p. 148, James Whalen household; digital image, "Kansas, U.S., State Census Collection, 1855 - 1925," Ancestry.

[21] "Armourdale: Mr. James Whalen…," Kansas City Times, Armourdale, Kansas, 26 May 1885, p.3, col. 3; digital image, Newspapers.com.

28 Feb 1886 - Birth of son Patrick Joseph Whalen at Armourdale, Wyandotte, Kansas.[22] His father Jacobus Whalen ex loco Dungarvan in Hibernia.

On this baptismal record, I found the only clue for the townland of the Whelan family in Ireland.

Naturalization - This is NOT my James Whalen.

2 Feb 1888 - Birth of son John Whalen at Armourdale, Wyandotte, Kansas.[23]

His father, Jacobus Whalen, ex loco Dungarvan in Hibernia.

23 Nov 1889 - Birth of son Michael James Whalen at Armourdale, Wyandotte, Kansas.[24]

1889 - Death of mother Catherine Sullivan, probably near Dungarvan, Waterford, Ireland.[25]

I need to verify the death record for Catherine Whelan of Dungarvan, Waterford, who died in 1889 at 70, to confirm whether she is my ancestor.

1890, 1891 - Directory - r 818 s 4th at Kansas City, Wyandotte, Kansas.[26]

12 Feb 1892 - Birth of son Edward Paul Whalen at Armourdale, Wyandotte, Kansas.[27]

2 May 1892 – **Kansas City Gazette** Kansas City, Kansas.[28]

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[22] St. Thomas Catholic Church (Kansas City, Kansas), Baptismal Registers, p. 20, Number 77, Patricium Whalen, baptized 14 March 1886; provided by Fred Schreel.

[23] St. Thomas Catholic Church (Kansas City, Kansas), Baptismal Registers, p. 40, Number 151, Joannem Whalen, baptized 2 February 1888; provided by Fred Schreel.

[24] St. Thomas Catholic Church (Kansas City, Kansas), Baptismal Registers?

[25] No death record has yet been found.

[26] Kansas City, Kansas Directory, 1890

[27] U.S., Social Security Applications and Claims Index, 1936-2007 St. Thomas Catholic Church (Kansas City, Kansas), Baptismal Registers?

[28] "The South Side," The Kansas City Gazette, Kansas City, Missouri, 2 May 1892, p.3, col. 5; digital image, Newspaper.com.

"The infant child of Mr. and Mrs. James Whalen of South Fourth street, was attacked and frightfully bitten by a vicious dog Saturday afternoon on the back porch of the Whalen residence. The wounds are not fatal."

11 Jun 1892 – Death of son James Whalen (1884 - 1892)

Two newspaper articles report on the tragic drowning death of 8-year-old James. At the time of the accident, his father was living either in New Mexico or Texas.

Drowned in the Kaw River.[29]

"James Whalen, a 10-Year-Old Boy, Gets Beyond His Depth at Armourdale.

James Whalen, a boy 10 years old, was drowned in the Kaw river at Armourdale this afternoon about 1 o'clock. He was in swimming with a number of other boys near the Eighth street bridge and got out where the water was too deep for him. He lived with his parents at 818 South Fourth street. His father is a stonemason and is at present in Texas."

Kansas City Star
June 11, 1892

A second story appeared about James Whalen drowning:
"A Victim of the Treacherous Kaw

The classic Kaw has claimed another victim. This time it is 10-year-old Jimmie Whalen, son of the well-known Southside contractor. The deceased, though young in years, was considered a good swimmer, and according to the story of his companions, he was very much in love with that pleasant pastime.

Saturday afternoon, little Jimmie took his last swim. Near the Belt Line bridge, the boys had erected a springboard, and from this board, Jimmie made his fatal dive. The water was shallow, and when Jimmie shot into the water, his head stuck in the treacherous mud just long enough to cause his death. His body was recovered and removed to his parents' home, 818 South Fourth street. The last sad rites were performed yesterday when the

[29] "The South Side," The Kansas City Gazette, Kansas City, Missouri, 2 May 1892, p.3, col. 5; digital image, Newspaper.com. Kansas City Star, June 11, 1892 "A Victim of the Treacherous Kaw"

remains were laid to rest in St. John's cemetery. The father, who is at present constructing a smelter in New Mexico, was informed of the sad bereavement."

18 Mar 1894 - Birth of son William James Whalen (1894 - 1933)

Only William James had a sponsor with the surname Whelan among the children. The sponsor, Catherine Whelan, is likely William James's oldest sister."

Before 1895 – **Death of daughter Jane Whalen (1882 - before 1895)**, probably at Armourdale, Wyandotte, Kansas; Jane's death record has not been found, and she is not in the 1895 KS Census.[30]

22 Feb 1895 – **Death of daughter Catherine Elizabeth Whalen (1878 - 1895)** at Armourdale, Wyandotte, Kansas.[31]

Taken together, these deaths reflect an accumulation of loss over time rather than a single defining event

1895 – Kansas Census.[32]

James Whalen, 42

Mary Whalen, 38

Patrick Whalen, 9

Mike Whalen, 5

Eddie Whalen, 3

Wm Whalen, 1

Patrick Dempster, 62

[30] 1885 Kansas State Census, Wyandotte, Wyandotte County, p. 148, James Whalen household; digital image, "Kansas, U.S., State Census Collection, 1855 - 1925," Ancestry.

[31] Record of Mortality #1922 - Kansas City, KS Records Vol. A

[32] 1895 Kansas State Census, Ward 6, Kansas City, Wyandotte County, p.10, Dwelling 1702, Family 1727, James Whalen household; digital image, "Kansas, U.S. State Census Collection, 1855 - 1925," Ancestry.

Mary Dempster, 61

Nellie Dempster, 15

Geo Smith, 28

James Irvin, 19

1895 – **Death of son John Whalen (1888 - 1895)** at Kansas City, Wyandotte, Kansas.[33]

John died before 1895 because he was not on the Kansas census. No death record has been found.

7 Aug 1895 - Arrested at Armourdale, Wyandotte, Kansas.[34]

"James Whalen was arrested yesterday for being drunk." Kansas City Journal, Kansas City, Missouri

After 1895 - Death of sister Mary Whelan O'Neill at Waterford, Ireland.

Feb 1896 - Elected president of the Stone Mason Union #1.[35]

"Stonemasons' Union, No.1, of Kansas City, Kas, has elected the following officers: James Whalen, president; D.R. Stanley, vice president; James Fleming, corresponding secretary; Henry Gottman, treasurer."

10 May 1896 – **Death of wife Mary Ann Dempsey (1856 - 1896)** at Kansas City, Wyandotte, Kansas.[36]

[33] No source, based on not being on the 1895 Kansas census.

[34] "Armourdale: Mr. James Whalen…," Kansas City Times, Armourdale, Kansas, 7 Aug 1895, p.5, col. 3; digital image, Newspapers.com.

[35] "Miscellaneous: Stonemasons' Union…," Kansas City Journal, Kansas City, Missouri, 9 February, 1896, p.13, col. 4; digital image, Newspapers.com.

[36] Kansas City (Kansas) City Clerk, Record of Mortality, Volume A (1892 - 1903), p.71, Mrs. Whalen, died 10 May 1896.

13 July 1896 – **Death** at Kansas City, Wyandotte, Kansas.[37]

Consumption. I need to recheck Kansas City's death records now that I have the date of death.

With the deaths of both parents in 1896, sons Patrick, Mike, Ed, and Willie were sent to the same orphanage. Their older sister, Minnie, age 16, was likely considered too old and married within four years."

17 Jul 1896 - Obituary at Kansas City, Wyandotte, Kansas.[38]

"Whalen, July 18, James Whalen, aged 35 years, of consumption at his residence, 921 South Fifth street."

Jul 1896 - Burial at St. John's Cemetery in Kansas City, Wyandotte, Kansas.[39] Probably in a family plot. His wife and a number of his children died, and death records show they are buried at this cemetery, but the cemetery office does not know the lot location of those burials.

Taken together, the surviving records document James Whelan as a working man whose family life, labor, and responsibilities remained tightly connected even as circumstances changed.

18 Oct 1896 - Tombstone Dedication at St. John's Cemetery in Kansas City, Wyandotte, Kansas, on the 47th anniversary of James Whelan's baptism near Dungarvan, Waterford, Ireland.[40]

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[37] No death record has yet been found.

[38] "WHALEN," obituary, The Press, Kansas City, Kansas, 17 July 1896, p. 5, col. 1; digital image, Newspapers.com.

[39] "Find a Grave Index," database, *FamilySearch* (https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:QVVK-3976 : 5 March 2021), James H. Whalen, ; Burial, Kansas City, Wyandotte, Kansas, United States of America, Saint John's Cemetery; citing record ID 23360762, *Find a Grave*, http://www.findagrave.com.

[40] "Whalen Monument Unveiled," The Press, Kansas City, Kansas, 23 October 1896, p.1, col.3; digital image, Newspapers.com.

"Whalen Monument Unveiled. Monday afternoon, the monument of the grave of the late James Whalen at St. John's cemetery was unveiled by Kansas City, Camp No. 49, Woodmen of the World. The ceremony was most impressive. Camp No. 32 also took part in the services."

1896 – his sons Patrick, Michael, Edward, and William were sent to St. Vincent's Orphanage. The oldest surviving daughter, Minnie, was not sent to the orphanage. A letter was written to his sister Nora Whalen Mullahy in Ohio, probably from the Dempseys, explaining all that happened. This letter is in the possession of Nora Schreel.[41]

[41] Phone conversation with Fred Schreel

Appendix:

A. Investigating James Mason's Connection to the Whelan and Dempsey Families

The identity of James Mason and his possible connection to James H. Whelan remains unresolved. In multiple Kansas City, Kansas, death records for members of the Whelan family, James Mason—and at times E. M. Doyle—appears as the informant, suggesting an ongoing association rather than an isolated role.

In the 1885 Kansas State Census, a James Masse—likely a variant spelling of Mason—was enumerated near Patrick Dempsey, James H. Whelan's father-in-law. This James Mason, age 33, lived with his wife Elinda Mason and their children: James Jr. (6), Elly (3), and Eda (1). The proximity of the Mason and Dempsey households, together with James Mason's repeated appearance in Whelan family records, raises the question of whether this connection reflects kinship, marriage ties, or a long-standing personal relationship. At present, no evidence confirms which of these explanations, if any, is correct.

B. Baptismal Records for the Children of James Whelan and Mary Ann Dempsey

The baptismal records for the children of James Whelan and Mary Ann Dempsey are recorded in the registers of St. Thomas Catholic Church in Armourdale, Kansas (now part of Kansas City). These records are currently held by St. Joseph and St. Benedict Church, located at 229 S. 8th Street, Kansas City, Kansas (913-371-1837).

C. Stained-Glass Windows and Bell from St. Thomas Church, Armourdale

In 1994, construction began on Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Lenexa, Kansas, the parish later attended by the William Roach Whalen family. The stained-glass windows and church bell installed in the new building were transferred from St. Thomas Church in Armourdale, which had closed several years earlier.

St. Thomas Church had been the parish of James Whelan and Mary Ann Dempsey, as well as the James Dempsey family, and most of their children were baptized there. Although the St. Thomas Church building from which these items came—constructed in 1917—postdated the period when James and Mary Ann were parishioners, the reused windows and bell provide a tangible link between the earlier Whelan–Dempsey family in Armourdale and later Whalen generations in Kansas.

D. Manifest, S.S. France, arrival 2 July 1873, sailing from Liverpool, England to New York, unpaginated, line 26, James Whalen, age 20 [born 1853], NARA, "Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at New York, New York, 1820-1987, microfilm no. M237

Hamilton County, Tennessee, Marriage Returns, p. 76, J.H. Whelan - Mary A Dempsy, license issued 16 May 1877; "Tennessee, County Marriages, 1790-1950," FamilySearch.

Wyandotte County, Kansas, Petition for Appointment of Guardian, D:264, case no. 2641, Whalen, Minnie, Edward William, Michael, and Patrick Whalen, minors, 1986; originals at Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas; KSHS microfilm AF4451, item 4